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1 September 1966

No. 1598/66
Copy No. 148

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

VIET CONG ANTIELECTION ACTIVITY IN SOUTH VIETNAM

DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
Directorate of Intelligence
1 September 1966

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

Viet Cong Antielection Activity in South Vietnam

Summary

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the Communists are placing heavy emphasis on frustrating the South Vietnamese Government's attempt to conduct an election of delegates to a National Constituent Assembly on 11 September. Although current reports show only relatively minor harassment activity on the part of the Viet Cong, the signs are that in the next ten days before the elections they will increase both the tempo and ferocity of their activity.

Another thread which has become discernible in the pattern of the Viet Cong's activity is the attempt on their part to link up with the Buddhist antielection effort. A successful meshing of Viet Cong efforts with those of the Buddhists to oppose the GVN-backed elections might seriously affect the size of the voter turnout on 11 September. Although some mutual cooperation is possible, the Communists will most probably try to mask part of their own antielection program behind that of the Buddhist Institute.

The National Liberation Front has reiterated its call for a boycott of the elections and has issued an ill-concealed threat that its campaign to sabotage the elections will continue to expand. The theme that the elections in South Vietnam are a "fraud" continues to emanate from Hanoi. Both the Liberation Radio and Radio Hanoi have increased the amount of time they are devoting to denunciations of the elections in the South.

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General Situation

1. The Viet Cong appear to have moved their efforts to sabotage the South Vietnamese National Constituent Assembly elections, scheduled for 11 September, into higher gear. Intelligence reports reflect intensified planning activity and a greater number of incidents which the Communists have perpetrated or sponsored in one form or another among the people.

2. At the moment there does not appear to be any new turn in the Viet Cong tactics to sabotage the elections. The preponderance of reported incidents still are in the nature of propaganda exhortations and warnings to avoid the elections. Most of the incidents are occurring in hamlets and villages, principally in insecure areas or those being secured. In the towns, Communist antielection activity has been largely confined to such furtive acts as the hanging of antielection banners or the scattering of leaflets under the cover of darkness. There have only been a few acts of terrorism which might be directly linked to the Communist antielection campaign.

3. However, the voice of the National Liberation Front, the "Liberation Radio," on 26 August took credit for several recent military-terroristic actions in the Saigon area, including the 23 August mining of the freighter Baton Rouge Victory in the Saigon River. The Front broadcast maintained that these actions were in response to a 15 August communiqué of the "Liberation Armed Forces" in the Saigon-Gia Dinh area (broadcast on 21 August) which called for a stepup of antielection activity. The Viet Cong characterized the terrorist tactics as part of a general campaign to frustrate the "despicable elections farce," and warned GVN officials and the Americans that they cannot "coerce" the urban population to vote without being punished. They also promised to intensify their activities as the election draws nearer.

4. There are several reports that the Communists are attempting to tie in their activities with

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those of the Buddhist Institute, which has called for a policy of "noncooperation" with the GVN-sponsored elections and for a boycott by the Buddhist laity. Some reports tell of Viet Cong contacts with bonzes in the pagodas in order to further the antielection effort. There is still no evidence, however, of a nationally coordinated Buddhist - Viet Cong effort, and at least one report indicated that the Communists would try to avoid associating terrorist acts with the essentially nonviolent Buddhist boycott.

5. On the basis of indications received in intelligence reports, there is every reason to believe that, as election day draws nearer, there will be an increase in the tempo of Communist activities. This promise has been aired openly by Liberation Radio. Reports suggest that there may be demonstrations to disrupt the voting, bombings and grenadings, kidnappings and assassinations of officials and candidates, sabotage of roads and canals providing access to polling places, and shelling of the polls. The zenith of Communist activity [redacted]

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[redacted] will be on or about 11 September.

6. Communist antielection plans and actions in each corps zone are discussed below:

I Corps Tactical Zone

7. In the I Corps Zone, there are increasing reports of the movement of large military units which are to be used in supporting the over-all Viet Cong antielection effort. Such troop relocations have been reported from Quang Nam and Quang Ngai provinces. In Quang Nam, there is to be a coordination of the efforts of guerrillas and main force units in the general vicinity of Hoi An, the province capital. Increased action is also planned against secured areas in the vicinity of Hoa Vang, a district town just south of Da Nang.

8. [redacted] the Viet Cong on 21 August issued a three-phase plan to disrupt the election in Quang Nam Province. In phase one--

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during the campaign--candidates are to be heckled and deprecated, and whispering campaigns are to be started. Secondly, just prior to the election, people are to be urged to declare that their identity cards are lost and voters to be pressed to invalidate ballots and spread rumors that Viet Cong secretly control voting booths. During phase three--on election day--voters are to be told to claim that soldiers beat them, presumably in an effort to show the GVN rigged the elections. All these activities will be in addition to a supporting program of increased military operations, candidate assassinations, and propaganda activity.

9. Elsewhere in I Corps, armed Viet Cong bands have coerced hamlet residents into listening to anti-election propaganda lectures (Thua Thien Province) and spread propaganda leaflets critical of GVN and US actions in regard to the forthcoming election (Quang Tri Province). In Quang Tin Province, there are reports of the Viet Cong smuggling explosives into the province capital of Tam Ky, which are to be used to sabotage polling places.

10. In I Corps, the most serious incident which may be related to Communist antielection activity occurred in Quang Tri Province. In this incident, two hamlet chiefs were assassinated by the Viet Cong, probably because of their activities connected with the election.

11. In Hue, the Viet Cong have purportedly made several visits to pagodas in order to proselytize the Buddhist clergy. These visits have not been reported to the authorities, allegedly because of the monks' distrust of the government and police. A report from Quang Nam indicates that the Viet Cong want to cooperate with the Buddhist struggle against the elections, which is essentially nonviolent in character. Because of this desire, to keep terrorist action dissociated from support of the Buddhist effort, the local Communists are reportedly going to stand down on any violent action which may be linked to them. The general order for this line of action reportedly originated with MR V headquarters.

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II Corps Tactical Zone

12. Widely scattered reports from this corps indicate an upsurge in planning activity as well as an increase in low-level Communist activity to disrupt the elections.

13. The current planning here seems to be generally the same as for other parts of the country --a continuing increase in harassment of the electorate; kidnappings and assassinations of candidates and officials; and finally on election day, direct sabotage activities against voting booths. In Kontum Province, a slight variation in the propaganda line was noted in that the Viet Cong will assist villagers not to vote if the GVN attempts to force them to go to the polls.

14. In the city of Nha Trang, observers report that the threat of Communist antielection activity remains, but that authorities are prepared to apply stricter security measures as the election draws nearer.

15. In Pleiku Province, the Communists have threatened action against American installations and residences in order to distract security forces from election security missions.

16. Overt actions indicate a heavy emphasis on the seizure of personal identification papers. This action, which now appears to be a standard practice through the country, can effectively prevent individuals from casting ballots and also impede their ability to move about the country. In Da Lat, antielection banners were hung and leaflets spread by the Communists on the night of 28-29 August. A Liberation Front flag was also raised during the same night.

III Corps Tactical Zone

17. Only a relatively few reports have been received of Viet Cong intentions and activities with regard to sabotaging the national elections. These plans so far have revealed no unique intentions and generally follow the now well-defined pattern of intimidation and propagandizing of the electorate and

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future plans to destroy polling places on election day. There have been no particularly significant activities in the region aside from the previously noted rash of incidents close to Saigon which the "Front" claims were part of its general program to disrupt the election.

18. Of some interest is the attack on a Chieu Hoi center, some 40 miles northwest of Saigon in Binh Duong Province, which has been characterized as part of the Communists' larger plan to create an atmosphere of pre-election terror. The connection with the antielection campaign seems tenuous since Viet Cong attacks are usually planned well in advance--perhaps months in some cases--and this occurrence in the midst of the antielection effort may be a coincidence. This does not preclude later Communist claims that the attack was part of an overall antielection plan.

IV Corps Tactical Zone

19. A large volume of reports concerning Viet Cong intentions to sabotage the elections and incidents related thereto have been received from this corps.

20. There are some indications that main force battalions in the delta region have been moved about to give support to local forces in other areas. One such Viet Cong battalion has reportedly been ordered from Kien Giang Province to Phong Dinh Province to support military actions associated with the anti-election program.

21. Plans and intentions of the Viet Cong to disrupt election activity follow the usual pattern in this corps. Heavy emphasis seems to be placed on the collection of ID cards and the closing of canals to traffic just prior to election day in order to prevent movement to polling places. In Vinh Long Province, a possible election-associated incident was the mining of a bus in which 16 persons were killed and 10 others wounded. According to one report, the city of Can Tho is to be blockaded by the Viet Cong from 9-13 September in an effort to prevent people from moving to polling places. Also in the Can Tho

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area, antielection demonstrations are planned for 7 September. These demonstrations are to be organized by moving people from contested areas into the city.

22. Three Communist cadres were recently apprehended in Kien Hoa Province carrying explosives for killing candidates. Also in Kien Hoa, the Viet Cong have reportedly ordered people not to go to markets from 1-15 September. This latter prohibition presumably can only be enforced on people living in areas controlled by the Communists.

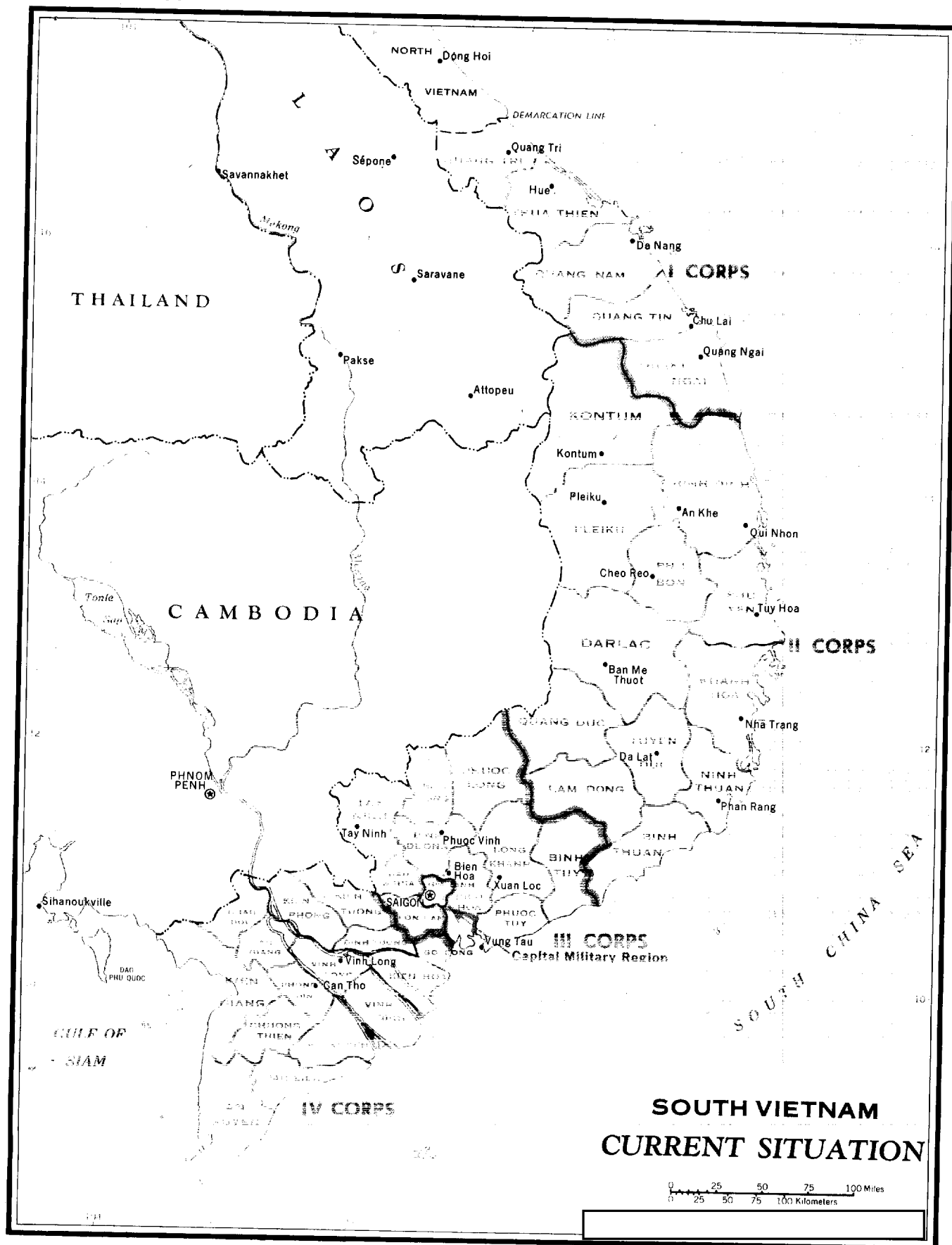
Viet Cong Military Activity

23. The level of Viet Cong - initiated activity increased throughout South Vietnam during the period 21-27 August, with 671 incidents reported compared with the previous week's total of 556. Twenty-three attacks or ambushes were reported, more than in any of the three previous weeks, including three battalion- and four company-sized assaults. Nearly half of the attacks occurred in the heavily-populated IV Corps area, which has been the scene of substantial Communist antielection activity. At least three incidents were reported in Gia Dinh Province, which surrounds Saigon. The rate of terrorism and sabotage increased only slightly. However, the incidence of propaganda activity reflected a sharp increase from 18 to 31, most of which was probably of an antielection nature.

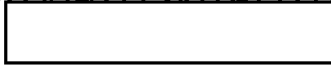
24. Throughout the week, all four corps areas continued to report firm evidence that the Viet Cong have a centrally directed plan to disrupt the 11 September elections both by direct intimidation of the population and by staging spectacular incidents designed to embarrass and frustrate the GVN. However, the over-all pattern of Communist activity, while increasing in total volume, continues to emphasize small-scale probing or harassing actions, with no well-defined upsurge in major antielection acts of terrorism yet discernible.

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